

My name is Jennifer Blackwell and I live in Ridgefield. I am in support of Senate Bill 1054, however our children need more. I would respectfully request this Committee to add language to address the issue of Public Schools not having specialists who can teach students with Dyslexia.

My son Robbie has dyslexia and it has and continues to be a stressful struggle for both of us. Robbie started Kindergarten at 4 ½ due to a December birthday and we knew going in that we would have him repeat it. By the time he was mid-way through first grade and he was a bright boy who went to bed with a pile of books that he could not read, I asked the school to test him. They told me he had a learning disability and offered special ed. Not much progress was made and he did a Wilson reading program over the summers between K and 1st grade, each time losing two reading levels by September, even after doing their program. At the end of 2nd grade, his special ed teacher told me he “was the most profoundly learning disabled child she has ever had.” And that she does not know what to do with him. As you can guess, this set off alarm bells in my head! Something had to change! My son was angry, depressed and frustrated all year. And I realized he doesn’t have a “Learning Disorder” he has Dyslexia! Something that is known and there are people know how to teach these kids.

I found a summer program for him at a local private school that had a division for reading LD and used the Orton-Gillingham approach. My son was happy to go to summer school, flourished and felt accomplished. In September, he had actually gone up two levels in reading! I paid for this as the school refused to pay for it, as they felt the program that caused him to slide back levels every year was “appropriate”.

But back to his same school, back to Wilson, he has fallen back. I have requested 1:1 tutoring with an Orton-Gillingham certified educator. Denied. Oh, and his special ed teacher is not even certified in the program they are doing with him.

I did request at the beginning of the year that a “mini-lesson” be taught to all the kids in his class explaining that he has dyslexia and that he was not “stupid”. (As I am certain many children who read easily must perceive someone who cannot master this skill.)

So now I have a lawyer and we are going to mediation so that my son can get the help he needs. He needs to be able to read. There are schools that can help him.

I do not believe anyone in Ridgefield understands dyslexia and is trained to detect or work with children that have dyslexia. They fight all attempts to get help for our children. You will get only basic Wilson unless you show up to a meeting with a lawyer. (My son is two grade levels behind, which they deem, “making progress”, and only gets 45 minutes 4 days a week of reading help.) He cannot read a menu, do a word search or read a book. We need help. My son is struggling and so am I.

I believe all districts should have an Orton-Gillingham fellow on staff. All K and 1st grade teachers should go through Orton-Gillingham training and **all** kids should be taught to read using this approach. Districts should be encouraged to work together to create K-3rd grade magnet schools for children with Dyslexia. Catching them early will save them so much money. As well as improving the general wellbeing of our children. Nothing is worse than knowing you’re the worst reader in the class – that your books come from a grade or two below everyone else. All children can learn to read if they are caught early enough. I am hopeful that it is not too late for my 3rd grader, but it might be - but I am not ready to give up the fight to get him an appropriate education.

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